

## Heading Back to the Classroom in a Positive Headspace

August means back to school time for families across the country. Students in grades K-12 are gathering school supplies and packing bags as they get ready to head back to the classroom.

For many, the start of the 2021-2022 school year will be particularly unique, as many students have not set foot in a physical classroom since March of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic brought in-person learning to a screeching halt. While some families opted for a “hybrid” form of learning, many opted to stick strictly to virtual learning.

The stress that this is causing for many, in addition to the other unique aspects of this school year, is leading to an increase in anxiety in students and adults alike. Marybeth Evans, a licensed clinical social worker at OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Evergreen Park, Illinois, breaks down how to manage heading back to the classroom and easing the back-to-school stress and anxiety.

“Every year, going back to school creates anxiety in parents and children and teachers – and this is just a different kind of anxiety. I think maybe what people need to do is anticipate that change is always difficult, and once we get used to the change and respect the change I think people will naturally get more comfortable,” says Evans.

This school year, the state-wide mask mandate in Illinois will require students, faculty, and staff in schools all across Illinois to [wear a mask](#) in the classroom in order to protect themselves and their peers against COVID-19. This is something that is trending all across the country.

While keeping kids in their masks can be considered another challenge to this already unique school year, it allows students to get that face-to-face, in-person interaction that has been missing for some time now due to the pandemic.

“I think everybody needs to take into consideration the social aspects of COVID on children and needing to be with their peers and needing to have interaction. Also the social effect on parents who have needed to be teacher, worker, mother, and so on,” Evans explains.

Furthermore, the lack of social interaction during the pandemic has led to a [behavior regression](#) in some children.

One benefit that occurred during the most recent school year was a decline in bullying across the country. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, in 2019 one in five students reported being bullied. However, this decreased in the 2020-2021 school year in large part due to virtual learning.

“I know a lot of young children that have had bullying issues in the past are very concerned about going back to school, because they’ve been isolated from bullying to a certain extent by attending school online and staying offline in between school,” warns Evans. “I think teachers need to be aware of that and basically give them some lessons about how this has been good for everybody to have a year free of bullying and we want to keep that going.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises that teachers, parents, and programs can help children by carefully planning the transition back to in-person learning, making strong connections, and helping students establish new routines. It also is helpful to make the morning “goodbyes” short and sweet in order to make it easier for your child to head off to school without hesitation or homesickness. Most importantly, the CDC recommends parents, guardians, and teachers [take care of themselves](#) during these stressful times, so they can better help their students and children.

For those who may find they need extra support, [OSF SilverCloud](#) is a secure, anonymous and interactive online platform to help manage the feelings and causes of depression, anxiety or stress.